

CONSIDERATIONS FOR DESIGNING ON-THE-JOB TRAINING (OJT) SITES

INTRODUCTION

Another tool is about to be added to our “toolkit.” Each VR/RU counselor will soon be able to access PATH discretionary training funds for the purpose of utilizing the on-the-job training option (OJT) as a precursor to competitive employment. Each counselor will be assigned two OJT “slots” for use in the current fiscal year. The following are some considerations, guidelines and cautions as you prepare to access this option.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the OJT is to enhance the likelihood that an employer will make a commitment to hire a TANF recipient with significant barriers to employment, after successful completion of a training program. Typically, the OJT should be considered an opportunity for one of your clients to learn the requirements of the job, to “showcase” their talents and to demonstrate their commitment to a promising, though somewhat reluctant, employer.

The OJT option should never be utilized simply as an opportunity to assess the client’s current work skills, to “try-out” different jobs, or as an activity to demonstrate the “seriousness” of the client to pursue employment. The OJT is really meant to be a final step leading to competitive employment. It is more appropriate to pursue community service placements or work experience options for people with no idea of the type of employment that would suit their skills, abilities and accommodate their limitations. None of these pre-employment options should be considered as part of a continuum leading to competitive employment. Philosophically, all people on your caseloads should be considered job ready-if we could only come up with the right job-match.

DESIGN OPTIONS

It is important that each counselor has the ability to tailor the OJT to suit the employer, the person in training and any unique factors present in the worksite. However, don’t ever enter into an agreement with an employer for an open-ended OJT. There can be some latitude in the design of the OJT and the following guidelines should be taken into consideration. In general, it makes sense to promote one of the following options:

A. Time-Limited 50/50 Option. Training costs are shared between the program and the employer on a 50/50 basis for two weeks. At that time you evaluate and determine that:

- 1) The employer will hire the person;
- 2) The person is not a viable candidate for this job; or

- 3) The OJT will be extended for an additional two weeks and evaluated again. Usually there would be recognition of issues that need to be addressed in these two additional weeks as well as strategies for addressing them. In some cases you may extend the OJT beyond four weeks. Before doing so, evaluate if there remains: a) significant interest on the part of the employer and a strong likelihood of a successful job match; and b) the issues that remain of concern are being sufficiently addressed through a clearly stated Plan of Action (POA). This POA including the actual intervention strategies and the performance expectations would be clearly understood by the employer, the person in training and the VR/RU counselor.

B. Increasing Commitment Option. The counselor agrees to pay all training costs for one week. At that time a discussion would occur between the counselor and the employer concerning next steps. If the employer is not convinced that the person is a viable candidate to work in this setting, the OJT may be terminated at this time. If it is believed that the person remains a viable candidate for employment in this setting, the employer may a) hire the individual at this time or b) extend the OJT with a financial commitment on the employer's part. If the decision is to continue the OJT, it is suggested that the employer now contribute 50% of the training costs. You may wish to gradually increase their commitment if the job match potential looks good but training may take a little more time. For example, offer to pay 75% in the second week and then decrease your commitment to 50% the third week. Hold there for another week or so. In other words, seek an increasing commitment from the employer while steadily decreasing your financial commitment. Each counselor should continually assess the likelihood that the employer will eventually make a commitment to hire. Seek ways to evaluate real progress and to support the employer's efforts to secure employment for the TANF recipient.

Note: We are paying the training cost which may, in fact, be higher than the hourly rate for the position if the person providing the training is paid a higher rate. We are offsetting the trainers salary.

DESIGN ELEMENTS

1. Employer Work-Based Training Agreement No OJT may begin until the employer, the counselor and the person being trained have signed the "Employer Work-Based Training Agreement." The agreement must be accompanied with a written job description. (Note: If a job description does not exist, ask the employer to list the job duties and the level of performance expected of an employee in this particular job.) You or your ETS may then write the job description up and attach it to the Worksite Agreement. Give a copy to the employer to verify the completeness and the accuracy of the job description.

2. Invoicing and the Worksite Evaluation Form Each employer should submit an invoice of training costs to the VR/RU counselor on a bi-weekly basis. (Note: We will soon be receiving a payment code in Access that will allow you to process payment for the OJT to the employer.) Included with the invoice should be the Worksite Evaluation Form. This form is used as the basis for discussion with the employer and the TANF

recipient about the desire to continue at the site as well as any additional training or performance concerns.

3. Work Opportunity Tax Credit. (WOTC) If an employer is interested in taking advantage of the WOTC tax credit, there are two important considerations. Prior to the starting work date, the WOTC tax form must be completed and signed by the employer. (IRS Form 8850) Secondly, the tax credit does not go into effect until the employer has assumed responsibility for 100% of the wages and the person is an “official” hire. Therefore, if the OJT lasts for one month, the employer only receives a tax credit for the subsequent 11 months. Additional questions about the use of the WOTC may be addressed to Mike Calcagni at DET. 828-4350.

OTHER

ESD has offered the VR/RU Pilot Program the opportunity to incorporate the OJT option into our array of services. The expectation is that we will exercise our good judgement in the utilization of these options. The reality is that the continued availability of this tool is dependent on its effectiveness in assisting you and your client in the pursuit of competitive employment. We will have to use these sites judiciously, but what else would you do with only two apiece? Effectiveness will be determined by cost, number of competitive employment placements achieved by this option and the longevity of placement.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR DESIGNING WORK EXPERIENCE PLACEMENTS

When a consumer has the basic skills necessary to enter a new occupational field but lacks on-the-job experience, employers may be hesitant to hire engage in an OJT. The Work Experience placement may be more conducive to assisting your consumer into a work placement. The basic premise of the WE is to offer an opportunity for a consumer to try out a job in a “real time”, to gain experience and make contacts in the chosen occupation. Furthermore, it’s a way for employers to try out an employee prior to making a commitment to hire. When setting up a work experience consider the following:

*it is preferable to use private employers as the sites; please do not use sites where there will be little opportunity for paid employment.

*negotiate the terms of the WE prior to placement with both employer and consumer, i.e., number of hours, days per week, length of WE

*negotiate with the consumer the level of stipend to be offered. Please note – a stipend is to defray the costs of going to work – it is not countable against a RUFA grant but is countable in the Food Stamp budget. (FS budget is only a small decrease, but is a decrease nonetheless). Factors to consider: number of hours per day, days per week, etc.

You can support the WE further by adding mileage from the ESD matrix and other items from the matrix as well.

*utilize the same forms as you would any other placement – i.e., worksite agreement, participant agreement, participant evaluation. Please obtain a participant evaluation on at least a bi-weekly basis.

*document consumer progress through contact via yourself, your ETS or job developer. Please keep case notes of progress in the consumer's file. Add the WE as a countable work activity in ACCESS

*WE placements should not be set up for longer than 3 months at any one employer. Some consumers have several WE placements that are short-term while others have been on one WE for 3 months, moved into an OJT or have been hired by the employer.